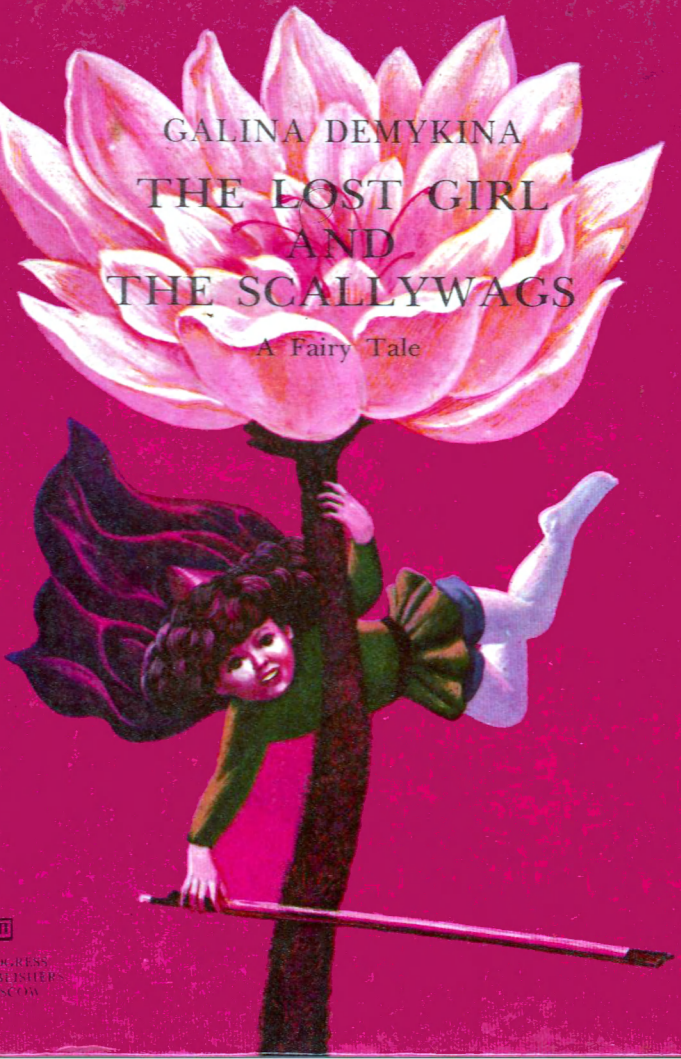
GALINA DEMYKINA

THE LOST GIRL AND THE SCALLYWAGS

A Fairy Tale



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WHO DWELLS WITHIN THIS BOOK

Within this book there dwells a little girl with pigtails. Her name is Zoya. And she is very fond of drawing. She always keeps a pencil and a sketchbook handy in her pocket, and paints and a painting book on the table. We shall also meet Zoya's Mother and Aunt Janina. Aunt Janina is the one in glasses; she doesn't wear them all the time, only when she's nervous. She has put them on now so that you won't mix her up with Mother. We must make the acquaintance, too, of Luba Vilkina, who has short hair. Try to remember her for later. That's all for the moment. Other characters will appear in due course. It all begins very simply.

CHAPTER ONE

HOW IT ALL BEGINS VERY SIMPLY

Zoya and her Mother and Aunt Janina are moving into a new flat. First of all they pushed a cat inside the door—for luck, as their old neighbour had told them. She was the one who had given them the cat. And she had said, 'You can keep that cat.' But Mother had told her, 'We couldn't possibly keep such a splendid cat.' The neighbour had insisted, 'Now don't you mind about her chewed-off ear, she lost that in a fight, as she's a tom cat. In fact, she—that is, he—is quite priceless.'

No sooner had the door to the new flat opened than the priceless tom cat flew into the kitchen and cowered behind the gas stove. He must have been most uncomfortable there but he, like his previous owner, never gave in and he kicked up a terrible fuss. To the accompaniment of his noisy complaint, they brought in the bits and pieces, arranged them neatly and began to bang in the nails and fix the screws for the curtains, mirror and pictures. It was a tough and noisy job. Thank Goodness Mother was up to it.

She hung the grandest picture in her own room. This picture had hung in Mother's room previously, and Aunt Janina would say softly and reverently when showing it to someone,

'This is a painting by Tadeus.'

The picture featured a green bush. It was overgrown, beginning to run wild and lean back upon an old wind-blown fence bespeckled with dark worm-like beetle holes. Alongside this fence a track meandered off into the picture frame. It was well-trodden. Someone had trodden it flat. Zoya had always fancied running down that beaten track, sitting against the sun-warmed fence, breathing in the fragrance of the straggling branches of the bush and the grasses. And she wished to take a look to see what was gleaming beyond the fence. It was something white; what exactly she could not see.

There was a banging coming from Zoya's room: that was Mother hammering in the nails for Zoya's pictures. Mother

thought that her daughter would enjoy being surrounded by these little paintings. Yet, Zoya would willingly trade them all for the painting in Mother's room.

'Zoya,' Mother cried. 'Come and give me a hand.'

Zoya did so.

'Hand me the drawings on the table, I can't reach.'

Zoya did so.

'Mummy, I'd give them all up for your picture,' she sighed.

Mother gave a laugh, but since she was holding a nail between her teeth it was a strange lop-sided laugh.

'Fee-Fee-Fee...'

Pulling the nail out of her mouth, Mother smiled.

'I bet you would,' she said. Then she added, 'Of course, Uncle Tadeus is a very distant relation, but he is a famous and splendid painter. And it may well be that he has passed on his gift to you.'

'Mummy, what is a gift?'

'It's talent.'

Zoya did not understand and fell silent for a moment. Then she asked again,

'Mummy, and what's talent?'

'It is a gift,' replied her Mother without thinking.

'What's that?' asked Zoya puzzled.

'It's what nature *gives* you, that's what.'

'And then what?' asked Zoya.

'What?'

'If Uncle Tadeus were to give me it?'

'Then you could draw well.'

At that Zoya was a trifle hurt: so Mother didn't like her drawings?

'You just say that to hurt me,' she cried. 'Gift is talent, and talent is gift? Is that it? First it was Uncle who was supposed to give it to me, then it was nature!'

Right at that moment Mother was lining up a nail and, distracted by Zoya's cry, she hesitated and brought the hammer down on her thumb, shouting crossly,

'Does it make any difference who did *not* give you something.

A sweet, for instance—from me or Aunt Janina? You haven't any sweets anyway.'

'Do *you* have some?' asked Zoya expectantly.

But Mother chuckled, shook her head and left the room.

Zoya was left to ponder: it seemed that no one had given her anything. So she was mighty sad. She took from her briefcase her paints, painting book and a little book which contained some words in strange letters about Uncle Tadeus. Zoya certainly could read, but she did not know these letters; they weren't Russian.

The little book also contained some sketches—those which Uncle Tadeus himself had drawn, only in miniature. Zoya was particularly fond of two little children: they had round little faces with round eyes and pixy caps on curly hair. One's hat was a dusky orange colour, the other's was a dull pink.

Zoya had painted exactly the same little children in her own painting book, only she had made their hats brighter. It turned out very pretty, even better than the artist's—or so Zoya felt. Yes, much better! 'I wonder what talent really is?' Zoya thought to herself, drawing the paint brush across the paper. 'And why didn't Uncle leave some to me? Did he forget or was he too mean?'

'Mummy, where is Uncle Tadeus now?' cried Zoya to the other room, quite forgetting she was cross with her Mother.

Mother opened the door and stood looking at her daughter.

'Aunt Janina has made tea for us,' she said.

She said it as though she had not heard Zoya's question. Yet she had heard it all right; she had heard it very well.

'Come on, Mother, tell me the truth: where is Uncle?'

'What does it matter?' Mother answered drily.

'But is he still alive?'

'Just remember, Zoya...' Mother's voice sounded curt and grave. 'Pray remember: an artist always lives on in his paintings. Do you understand?'

So that's it! Zoya gave a little gasp.

'Which ones?' she asked in a whisper.

'All of them.'

'In your one too?'

'Without a doubt.'

Mother went out without shutting the door. In the doorway she once more set to hammering nails; she was eager to have everything standing, lying and hanging in their proper places as soon as possible. From the kitchen wafted the warm smell of a freshly-baked cabbage pie. But Zoya was lost in thought, sitting at the table...

'So that's how it is. That's how it works, is it? Now I know why Aunt Janina would sigh when mentioning Uncle Tadeus: "When he worked he would be quite engrossed in his paintings".'

Zoya took another peep at the little children in her painting book. She was not so pleased with them now.

'Could it be that Uncle had left her that gift without telling anyone where he'd put it?' she wondered.

She would have to ask Aunt Janina.

Zoya snapped shut her painting book and ran to the kitchen, when all of a sudden...

CHAPTER TWO

ENTER LUBA VILKINA

...When all of a sudden the door bell buzzed loudly. Zoya and Mother and Aunt Janina rushed to open the door. And there stood a small, very cross little girl.

'Your banging is giving us all a headache,' the girl said.

'And who might you be?' asked Mother.

'Luba Vilkina,' said the girl. 'We live the other side of the wall. My Mother sent me.'

'Well, dear child,' broke in Aunt Janina, 'we've just moved in, you see.'

Luba was most surprised to hear she was a 'dear child' and began to look around the walls.

'I hope you haven't been knocking nails in with a hammer,' she said. 'You should first make holes with an electric drill...' But



she didn't finish what she was saying; her eye was caught by Mother's feet. She snorted, 'Fancy going about the house in high heels. How dreadful!'

Then Luba caught sight of the pie on the kitchen table and asked just as seriously,

'Will you give me a piece?'

Aunt handed her a big one to munch.

Luba Vilkina bit off a piece and asked inquisitively,

'What did you make it with?'

Aunt Janina was just about to explain when Luba suddenly noticed Zoya. And she brightened up.

'What's your name?'

Zoya said it was Zoya.

Then Luba cocked her head towards the street.

'Let's play skipping.'

So Zoya followed her down the stairs into the yard.

On the way Luba Vilkina took a toffee from her apron pocket, unwrapped it and popped it into her mouth; she threw down the grey semi-transparent toffee paper, with a black smudgy cat on it. Then she asked Zoya,

'What have you brought so many pictures for? Are you some sort of artist?' Almost at once her attention strayed as she shouted loudly, 'Hey, Nina, Nina, don't go, we're coming to skip-jump.' And she took a skipping rope with two wooden handles from her pocket.

Generally Zoya was pretty good at skip-jumping. She too had a skipping rope in the pocket of her frock. But this time she was outjumped, for Luba kept the rope tighter than she ought, and it didn't touch the ground. Zoya felt too shy to object. So she and the bushy-haired Nina had to turn the rope while Luba skipped and skipped.

When Luba had had enough of skipping, she popped another toffee into her mouth and called Zoya,

'Let's go to your place.'

Bushy-haired Nina was not invited and Zoya felt too shy to call her. She was also shy about picking up the discarded toffee paper. They went indoors.

Luba said,

'Let's be friends.'

Zoya was not that keen on being friends with Luba Vilkina. But since she did not know anyone else around she agreed.

When the girls returned, Mother and Aunt Janina met them happily: they were just in time to mind the house while the two women went shopping. Mother first went to her room to change her shoes: the two girls could see her tossing one pair into the corner and putting on another—also with high heels.

She was humming something to herself under the severe stare of Luba Vilkina.

When the girls were alone, Luba said,

'Let's pinch something of theirs.'

'Whose?' asked Zoya uncomprehending.

'Yours.' said Luba. 'Do you have any jam?'

'Yes. But they let me take some anyway.'

'Go on and take it then.'

Zoya searched out the jar of cherry jam and spooned some into saucers. Luba twisted and turned while she ate, peering round the apartment.

'How many rooms have you got?'

'Two.'

'So have we. You sharing with your Mother?'

'No, I've a room to myself because I draw.'

'Show me.'

Luba Vilkina went into Zoya's room. At once her eyes lit upon a carved black box on the bedside table; Aunt Janina had given Zoya it.

'Your money-box?' asked Luba quickly.

'No,' replied Zoya sharply, putting the box back in its place.

The box was very ancient, 'from Uncle's time', Aunt Janina had informed her. The box did not open—the key was lost—but something rustled and rolled in it when shaken; Zoya would have loved to know what it was.

Meanwhile Luba was walking round the room glancing at the pictures.

'Who on earth drew these monsters?' she asked.



Zoya was about to say someone else. But she owned up,

'I did. I call them *scallywags*.'

And Zoya opened up her painting book in which she had recently copied the two scallywags from Uncle Tadeus's book.

They hadn't really come out properly, that's true. All the same you could see one was younger and a bit of a sissy; the other was altogether a more serious fellow and seemed to be shielding the younger boy. Well, not really shielding him, rather helping him—after all, no one was teasing the youngster there. Nobody would tease him. That was clear enough.

Their clothing was funny: some sort of sleeveless jerkins on top of shorts, stiff wooden clogs...

Their little faces under the pixy caps were entirely innocent. Why did Luba call them 'monsters'?

Luba stared long and hard at the painting.

'Who on earth is that?' she finally asked disgruntled. 'They aren't right. And all this paint, paint and paint. Paints cost money, you know!'

Thereupon she drew her finger over the page roughened by the water colours.

'My Uncle is a painter and he also has pictures like that,' said Zoya hurt. 'Well, not quite like that, but similar.'

'What Uncle do you mean? What do I care about this Uncle?' And she began to make fun of Luba. 'I don't want to know him. How do I know you have an Uncle anyhow?'

'But I have, yes I have,' insisted Zoya, getting angry. 'I'll show you if you like.'

And she opened the little book at the page with the painter's picture: a man with a long narrow face looked out attentively and somewhat sadly at the girls. His eyes were brown and bright, his moustache and eyebrows likewise dark; he had a black beret on his head and a choker at his throat. Alongside him sat a reddish-brown bird. A sulky-looking bird on spindly legs. Somewhat drowsy.

'So what?' snorted Luba. 'A beret, fancy that! I've got one too. Maybe he didn't paint anything at all; perhaps all he did was feed that bird!'

'Didn't paint?' exploded Zoya angrily. 'Just come and see.'

She led Luba into Mother's room, sat her down on the couch and drew the curtains. Zoya drew the curtains to stop Luba wandering round the room, inspecting the bits and pieces and bottles on Mother's dressing table.

As it turned out, it would have been better if she had not done it.

CHAPTER THREE

WHY SHE SHOULD NOT HAVE DONE IT

No sooner had Zoya pulled the curtains to and Luba had fallen silent than it became clear at once that the painting dominated the room. It seemed to open up in all its width. Even in depth as well. Yet this time, and Zoya saw it at once, a blue light pervaded the picture. This gave the leaves, and track, and sky a sombre hue, highlighting the white spot behind the fence. Zoya was virtually certain now that this was a flower, a big white flower. And another thing she had not noticed earlier: in the right-hand corner of the picture—probably far in the distance—gleamed a house. From afar it seemed a toy house. One of its windows was lit up.

'How strange,' thought Zoya, 'it was all lit up by sunshine this morning. I wonder if the house will be visible in daylight?'

She wanted to get up and turn on the light, but all of a sudden... All of a sudden the leaves of the bush began to flutter in the wind and someone was seen running beyond the fence.

Zoya turned hot and cold in turn.

'Luba!' she exclaimed looking round.

But Luba was sitting on the edge of the sofa. She had taken off her red ankle boots with their funny wedge heels. And now she was trying on Mother's shoes. They fitted her perfectly.

'Look at this extra foot I've grown,' said Luba giggling.

'Luba, did you see that?' asked Zoya pointing to the painting.

'What?' asked Luba rudely.

'Didn't you see it; things were, er..., moving in the picture?'

'Give over,' exclaimed Luba and stared at the picture. Once more something stirred in the bushes. Luba almost jumped out of her skin.

'Aha, aha!' she muttered, then gave a wild shout, 'Hey, hey, you there! Come out of there. Scram!'

It became so quiet you could hear a pin drop. And then suddenly near at hand they heard a snorting followed by a pitiful wailing,

'Meeaaah!'

Luba grabbed Zoya's hand and made for the door.

CHAPTER FOUR

WHAT HAPPENED THAT DAY

The two girls rushed into the kitchen and, although it was not yet dark, they switched on the light. They put it on in the kitchen and in the hallway. Then they sat in silence for a long time. After a while Zoya spoke up.

'There was no need to be afraid. It must have been the cat. He's here, under the gas stove.'

They approached the stove and looked: for some reason the cat could not be seen.

'It was him anyway,' said Zoya. 'I recognised his voice.'

'And is there a cat in the picture too?' asked Luba in a sudden angry hiss.

'Why a cat?'

'Don't start that. I've got eyes, all right. I spotted him straightaway.'

'Who?'

'That monster. He was sitting behind the bush. Just staring at us strangely. And then he went and hid.'

'Yes, yes, Luba, I too felt someone was looking.'

Luba shrugged her shoulders.

'Skies above! Don't you go into that room.'

It was only then that she noticed she was wearing the high-heeled shoes. That meant her red ankle boots were still by the sofa.

'Don't worry,' said Zoya. 'We'll hook them out with the broom.'

Zoya was pleased that she was braver than Luba. She took hold of the long-handled broom and, averting her gaze from the painting, she retrieved Luba's shoes.

'There we are,' she said.

Luba calmed down a bit, changed shoes and asked,

'Do you have any pies left?'

With that they both got stuck into the plate of cabbage pie. All of a sudden Luba remembered something.

'As soon as I said "scram" to him he said "meeaaah".'

They both burst out laughing.

'I bet we put the wind up them, don't you?' cried Luba; and the girls giggled once more. 'That one nearest us, he was going "meeaaah".'

It wasn't really funny any more, yet they laughed and laughed...

Then the front door slammed and they heard the clitter-clatter of Mother's high heels.

Zoya ran into the hallway.

'I'm off,' said Luba. 'See you.'

Mother handed Zoya a big packet.

'Here's something to put on and bring you luck,' she said.

Zoya found in the packet red ankle boots with funny wedge heels—just like Luba's. She also had some clothes: a brand new jacket and trousers. Zoya put them on and looked really smart. And the jacket pocket was plenty big enough for her pencil and sketchbook. In the meantime Mother was scribbling something down on a piece of paper; she passed it to Zoya.

'In the trousers of the suit you'll find a little inside pocket,' she said. 'Put this note in there. It's our new address. If you get lost show it to a grown-up and they will bring you home.'





Thus said Mother. And it was a jolly good job she did give Zoya that note.

But we'll come to that in good time.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE 'FIND-YOUR-WAY-HOME' GAME

Have you ever played that game? I bet you haven't, because it was Zoya who made it up. She had thought of it back in her old house. And now she was going to teach Luba.

'I shut my eyes tightly and you turn me round a few times so that I don't remember where my house or anything is,' she said. 'And then you take me somewhere, come to a stop, hide and shout out: "One, two, three..." I open my eyes and—guess what—I won't know where I am.'

'Why won't you?' asked Luba surprised. 'I certainly would.'

'Oh no you wouldn't,' objected Zoya. 'While you were being led you would think you were going one way, and then you'd find yourself somewhere completely different. And therefore the place would seem unfamiliar.'

'What happens then?' asked Luba. She liked to know it all, down to the last detail.

'Well, then you have to find your own home.'

'What a silly to-do!' snorted Luba. 'All right, so what do I do while you're searching?'

'You sit in your hiding place and don't give me any clues.'

'And who wins?' piped up the quick-witted Luba.

'Well...' Zoya set to thinking. 'At my old place we didn't play for someone to win... It was good playing the game there. All the blocks of flats were different, there were play areas, and all sorts of hiding places...'

'But someone must have won, didn't he?'

'Well, I suppose the one who found home quickest. Yes, yes, that's it.'

'Begs I go first then,' said Luba quickly.

'Cross my fingers

Cross my toes
Me first and off it goes.'

Zoya agreed. She knew in a flash where to take Luba: to the waste patch. They hadn't been there before, that's for sure.

Zoya turned her friend round and led her past their tall beige-coloured tower block, passed by two more blocks looking much the same and turned up a narrow track away from the asphalt road. There weren't any flats here: the old wooden cottages had been pulled down and no new houses had so far been built. The tall grass was littered with bricks and boards, and here and there the remains of garden fences and snapped-off saplings thrust up above the grass.

'Lift you feet up higher,' said Zoya.

Luba was marching along with surprising assurance; as a rule children with their eyes shut lean on support. Not Luba!

Zoya guided Luba to a tumbledown fence beyond which there had once been a house; now all that remained were black-currant bushes and an apple tree.

Touch collar
Never swallow
Never catch the fever,
Touch your knee
Touch your chin
Never let the tom cat in.
One for you
One for me
One for all the family.
Cross my fingers
Cross my toes
That's the way the game goes.

A wind blew up, dark green leaves fluttered in the breeze. And it seemed to Zoya that she had been there before sometime. But she couldn't have!

'Stop,' she ordered Luba suddenly. 'Don't open your eyes yet.'

And she quickly ran to hide behind the bush, dodging down amidst the grass, crying: 'One, two, three...'





How lovely it was to sit there holding your breath. The black-currant leaves were thick and rustling and so high that they almost reached the top of the old fence; its wooden planks were warmed by the sun and as old as the hills, patterned by dark knots and bespeckled with dark worm-like beetle holes.

And again Zoya felt that she recognised these, precisely these planks with their wooden patterns. And then she remembered where she had seen them. 'Yes, but it can't be,' Zoya breathed. 'I am on waste-ground near home; if I give a good shout Mother will hear my voice; Luba is nearby on the path and, as likely as not, doesn't know where I've taken her.'

Zoya peeped from behind the bush. Luba was nowhere to be seen.

She stood up to her full height. The asphalt pavement beyond the waste ground had disappeared. And the blocks of flats ... they too had vanished into thin air. All she saw was the bush whose leaves and branches sprawled against the fly-blown tumbledown fence. The bush was beside her, the fence within arm's range. 'Oh, so that's it,' thought Zoya, getting just a trifle cross as if someone was having a game with her. 'Ah, so that's it. It would seem that I'm on the other side of the bush. But then there should be that white thing ... well ... that flower. And there isn't. That means all this cannot really exist.'

She was on the point of jumping out from behind the bush and running off home. But her eye was caught by a leafless bulging flower stem waving in the grass. Here and there fleecy buds were breaking through, and on the very top there sat a tightly-shut button-head—a closed little green box. Its leaves began to stir and unfold. There appeared the tips of white petals. The petals, pressed hard from the inside, burst outwards until broad pinkish petal tongues bestirred themselves as if they were breathing, escaping to freedom, feeling happy, exhaling a sweet heady fragrance.

No sooner had the blossom unfolded than a strange music could be heard, unlike anything Zoya had ever known before. The air turned violet and lent everything—the fence planks, leaves, grass, path, the trees alongside the track—a different hue

Zoya glanced up and saw a lilac-coloured sky; here and there it was pink, probably from the clouds. Zoya had never seen the like. But it was even more beautiful than usual, for the lilac sky presented a stark and cleanly-etched contrast to the big and small branches and the tiny twigs of the trees around. There were so many trees, and every leaf seemed interlaced with the lilac sky. But it wasn't only the skyline silhouette that had another hue, it was everything around her. Even about the white blossom hung a lilac haze. And the air around was lilac.

'What is happening?' Zoya wondered.

And then she realised:

What was happening to her was something that could never happen.

A rustling came from the bushes.

CHAPTER SIX

THE LILAC SCALLYWAG

Frightened Zoya stood rooted to the spot. She expected someone to appear from the bushes at any moment.

Who was it?

She could scarcely breathe. All kinds of thoughts raced in her head: 'What shall I do? Oh, Mummy! I've had it now. Where's Luba? Where's my home? Why did I have to dream up this game?'

All of a sudden something touched her on the shoulder.

'Oh!' screamed Zoya, looking round sharply.

Beside her stood a boy about the same height as herself. Only he was a funny-looking fellow. He was just like the boys she had copied from Uncle Tadeus's sketchbook. Luba Vilkina would have called him a 'monster'! But there was nothing frightening about him. His eyes and mouth smiled—no, they simply laughed, lit up with pleasure. Just as some lovely little animal—a kitten or puppy—looks at you and beams with pleasure. Thereupon the boy touched Zoya's cheeks with both hands. And that wasn't scary either: his hands were warm, very dry, even a little rough.





'Who are you?' asked Zoya in a whisper. And she replied herself:

'A scallywag! You must be a scallywag!'

'Scallywag?' said the boy, neither surprised nor reassuring. His voice was fluting, as from a pipe made out of a nut-tree cane. The boy nodded to her,

'And you're Zoya. I know.'

He took Zoya by the hand and led her along the track. Now she knew who had trodden down this track! Zoya was too shy to ask where they were going. All the same she felt a little easier. She had calmed down at once when she had set eyes on the Scallywag and realised how pleased he was to see her. Yet she then began to have her doubts again: where was he taking her? And she exclaimed,

'Scallywag!'

The boy turned immediately. His eyes seemed very big, with neither eyebrows nor eyelashes visible. He had coarse features, a pointed nose and round mouth. Now his face was attentive, even guarded.

'Dear little Zoya,' he said softly, 'are you still afraid?'

And it was clear he was upset that she was anxious.

'No, I'm not so scared any more. But I don't know where we're going.'

'We're going home,' the boy replied. 'It isn't far.'

They had already reached the pathway near the fence. Now, close at hand, Zoya saw the intertwining branches, the bulbous leaves, and she could smell the fresh, green verdure all around. Everything about her was wild and fragrant and lush.

And Zoya was suddenly filled with a happiness she had never felt before. A little rhyme whirled in her brain:

Pinkety, pinkety, thumb to thumb,
Wish a wish and it's sure to come.
If yours comes true
Mine will too,
Pinkety, pinkety, thumb to thumb.

Above her on a dry branch she saw the clear outline of a dark bird with a long narrow body and folded wings, and a long, long tail. The bird cocked his little head towards her and looked at her with his yellowish transparent eyes. Zoya pressed the Scallywag's hand.

Scallywag turned round. His face was radiant.

'Lovely, isn't it?'

Zoya was puzzled: that was the second time he had guessed what was in her mind.

'Yes, it's fine, just fine, Scallywag,' she breathed. 'Really lovely.'

Another bird fluttered up from a branch and lazily flew into the distance, into the lilac sky.

'I'll call it back if you like,' Scallywag suggested.

'No, let it fly away,' answered Zoya. She liked everything just as it was.

'Good girl,' said Scallywag approvingly.

'And if I had asked... Would the bird really obey you?'

'Yes.'

'Why?'

'Today, little Zoya, is my day.'

'What day?'

'Mine. Don't you see my cap?'

'It's so funny.'

'Really?' said Scallywag in surprise. 'I thought it was pretty. And it's lilac.'

'Yes, yes,' said Zoya hastily. 'It's pretty and lilac.'

'So there we are. That means, today's my day.'

Zoya did not quite understand, so she asked again softly,

'How is that?'

'I can do anything today.'

'What can you do?'

'Do you want a little donkey? I'll fetch one for you.'

The boy pressed his palms together, making a loud clap with his fingers outstretched. They heard a rustling, then a crackling, and then the clatter of hoofs; and along the path a light grey donkey came running. His coat gleamed dully and his eyes seemed as black as pitch. Zoya ran towards him and threw her

arms about his neck. He was the most wonderful donkey in the whole wide world, if only because she had never seen any others.

'Can I have a ride?' she asked. And she felt suddenly shy: how could she even dream of it?

Scallywag did not answer—Zoya was so thankful to him for that—and the three of them moved on along the little path.

First went Scallywag, then Zoya, with the donkey trailing behind. Zoya could fell his warm breath on her hand.

The track began to broaden so that the three of them were able to walk abreast. Scallywag and Zoya linked hands on either side of the donkey while he, head bent amiably, trotted along, clicking his heels—tic-tac, tic-tac...

Again the rhyme came to Zoya: 'Pinkety, pinkety, thumb to thumb...'

Scallywag nodded in the direction of the trees.

'See, there it is, our house.'

The house stood amidst dark tree trunks. It was rather like a toy building brick, only with a little low door. And without windows. It had a triangular roof—as if to fit Scallywag's three-cornered cap.

The little donkey glanced at the children, nodded his head to them and trotted off along the path. Scallywag and Zoya turned towards the house.

'Go on in,' said the boy opening wide the little door.

It was dark inside the house, though it seemed quite cosy. Zoya bent down and went in. Her feet sank into something soft and fluffy: the whole floor was covered with the down: 'Looks like a nest,' thought Zoya.

Voices could be heard, like the many trees and bushes swishing, each to their own tone: 'She's come.' 'Zoya's come.' 'I told you so.' 'Yes, but there was another girl with her.'

A little light burst into flame—the ordinary yellow flame of a candle; only it was surrounded by a lilac glow in the lilac air. In that light Zoya could see about her: in the corner of the house, from floor to ceiling and farther through the roof stretched the thick trunk of a sturdy tree. One of its branches hung beneath the ceiling. And on the floor, nestling in the down like little

birds in a nest there sat those same scallywags; only they all had on caps of different colours. An old man with a bulbous twig-like nose and big round eyes was leaning against the wooden wall close to the flame.

'Zoya's come amongst us,' he said, as if he had known her for some time and had been expecting her. His voice sounded like the bass notes of a reed pipe. Then he picked up a bow from the floor and went with it to the tree trunk growing up with the house.

Everyone fell silent. The old man moved the bow across the tree several times and the house was filled with music. How strange that music was: like woodland melodies. And the scallywags all began to sway to and fro and hum softly without opening their mouths. They all gazed at Zoya with round happy eyes; and she herself felt her eyes grow round and light up happily. She too began to sway. She felt as if a common breeze had lifted them all and lightly twirled them round so that they all somehow became as one.

When the old man broke off the melody, the breeze's hold was broken. Then Zoya had a good look round: there were six or seven scallywags. A scallywag in a red cap, a scallywag in yellow, one in green, blue... All their faces seemed the same; only the youngest—the one in a pink cap—had funny little staring eyes, his mouth wide open in curiosity. He could be recognised in an instant. And then, of course, there was the little girl—Ginger Scallywag-in-a-Headscarf. Her voice sounded more gentle and crystal-like than the others.

They had all been sitting quietly listening to the music, but then they were all babbling away and jumping up and down: one of them had buried himself in the feathers, another was turning somersaults, while the first scallywag—the one in the lilac cap—seized Zoya with both hands and twirled her round. All the others followed suit. And with them whirled the down just like a snow-storm. Zoya felt quite at home with them.

Then Zoya heard the measured sounds, like those of a bird's wings flapping. It was Granddad clapping his hands.

'Bedtime, bedtime,' he called. 'You should have been in your





feather beds long ago. The White Flower has already opened, the Song of Twilight is already sung. Bedtime, bedtime.'

'What strange things he's talking of,' was the thought that flashed through Zoya's mind.

There was no quieting the scallywags. Ginger Scallywag was particularly lively: she ran, pushed everyone over; her headscarf went flying, her hair streamed about her.

'I wonder if she'll knock me over or not?' mused Zoya. 'If she does, I know they've accepted me as one of them.'

Meanwhile Ginger had snatched someone's cap off; and long, tow-like straight hair tumbled down to his ears. He chased the little girl, but she hid behind Lilac Scallywag, then behind the Pink one... Next in line was Zoya. 'Will she run past or not?' wondered Zoya. 'Hide, hide behind me, Ginger,' begged Zoya silently. And she did: she ran up to Zoya, caught hold of her waist and said,

'Take this.' And then ran on.

Zoya found herself holding the funny yellow cap; and Yellow Scallywag, making faces and hopping higher than necessary, came charging towards her. Zoya could have taken to her heels—after all, she was a jolly good runner. But she tossed him the little cap, and it landed right on the scallywag's crown. Everyone laughed and gathered round Zoya.

'Bedtime, bedtime,' shouted Granddad clapping his hands.

But Ginger Scallywag whirled about shouting,

'Grandpa Big Nose, we shan't go to bed! Grandpa Big Nose, we shan't go to bed!'

At that Grandfather Musician slowly drew his bow across the branch that held the ceiling up. This was quite different music. It made one feel drowsy, a quiet languor seeped through one's body. The melody somehow interlaced with the lilac air, with the tree branches visible through the open door... It fused with the silence, with the gentle words, with sleep:

Bedtime, dreamtime,
Of fir and pine,
Of dangling vine,
Of riverside,

Of changing tide.
Birdie sleeps.
Donkey sleeps.
All that's yet to come—
Now sleeps...

Silence descended. Everyone had run to their places and nestled down in the feathers. Granddad even showed Zoya her place. It was all so pleasant and so strange: feathers above and below, and you—just like a fledgeling, a bird-child.

'Do you like it with us, Zoya?' asked Lilac Scallywag in a whisper from a distant corner.

'Yes, very much,' answered Zoya.

Grandfather Musician blew out the light. It became dark, cosy, quiet. Zoya laid her left hand on her right and, with her head cradled on her folded arms, went to sleep at once. She was so very tired.

CHAPTER SEVEN

AN ORANGE DAY

Zoya woke up in bright daylight. 'What lovely sunshine,' she thought. But she was wrong. It was certainly not the sunshine. Zoya sat up, began to pluck the feathers from her jacket and recalled how happy it had been before her slumbers. And yet now for some reason the former gaiety had vanished. Why? Zoya started quickly to rack her brains. What had happened? She always did that when anxiety filled her heart. And she went over it all:

fallen among scallywags, she liked them. Fine;
scallywags were happy. All because of her. Splendid;
a lilac sky made everything beautiful;
then delightful;
then cosy in the feather nest.
Was that all?
Then it came to her suddenly: Mother. Her Mother would





surely be worrying. She had to let her know soon that everything was all right. Zoya jumped up and then straightaway sat down again: how was she to do so? She didn't know the way home.

Zoya looked about her. The nest-like room seemed even cosier in the warm daylight. Only the old man remained. The old man with the nose like a twig, with the round lilac-blue eyes. As yesterday, he was sitting in the corner as if he had not slept at all. There was no sign of the scallywags—only now and then a feather would stir.

'Good morning, Granddad,' said Zoya timidly.

'Today the orange air breathe we. In an orange world dwell we,' he intoned instead of giving a greeting, nodding to Zoya. Yet all of a sudden he inclined his head towards her and said,

'Dear Zoya, have we done something to offend you?'

'Oh no,' Zoya muttered. 'No, no one ... me...'

'Then why are you weeping?'

'I'm not weeping... I only felt like weeping.'

'Same thing,' said Grandfather Musician.

He shut his round eyes and sat long in silence. Zoya was waiting for him to speak again in his strange old voice—the voice of a baritone pipe. Finally Grandfather Musician glanced at her again.

'Well, what did you weep for?'

'I was thinking of Mother. She'll be worried... Granddad, what time is it?'

Granddad looked surprised.

'You see, I ... I don't know what you mean.'

And from his round eyes it was evident he was speaking the truth. He always spoke the truth.

'The time, a clock, a watch,' said Zoya trying to explain.

'Clock? Watch?'

'Yes, you know, on the wall or on your wrist...'

Granddad stared at his wrists and then the wall, shaking his head.

'No, I don't know,' he muttered.

'Well, then, what day is it?' she asked.

At that he livened up.

'Yes, yes, the day! We have blue days, green, red...'

'You mean you have a different colour for each day?' she asked.

'Yes, Zoya, of course. And you?'

'Well, with us it's different. And how many hours do you have in your day?'

The old man shrugged his shoulders again—he didn't know anything about hours.

Zoya almost burst out laughing: fancy not knowing simple things like that! But she quickly asked another question.

'Today, Granddad, what day is it?'

'Today is orange. Just wait: as soon as my little scamps wake up they'll take you for a walk. An orange day is best.'

'Because of the sunshine?'

The old Musician set to thinking, puzzled. One would think that it was for the first time he had heard of sunshine.

Something stirred in the corner under the feathers; and out crawled the Scallywag in the orange cap. Zoya easily recognised him: he was the very one she had copied in her sketchbook alongwith Pink Scallywag. He was the bigger one who seemed as if he was protecting the smaller, and probably helping him.

'Today orange air breathe we!' he gave an excited shout and smiled broadly.

'In an orange world dwell we,' echoed Granddad calmly in low tones.

Then Zoya understood: that was how they said 'good morning' to one another. And Grandfather Musician had deliberately not corrected her when she had greeted him, so that she would come to understand herself. So Zoya now replied confidently,

'In an orange world dwell we.'

Orange Scallywag shook himself like a bird shaking his feathers, only he was shaking feathers from his jerkin and shorts.

Zoya went over to Grandfather Musician.

'Granddad, can Orange Scallywag do anything he likes when it's an orange day?'

'Yes, that's right.'

'Can he let Mother ... I'm here? Eh?'

'I'll ask him, Zoya. I hope Mother will understand our signs.'

Grandfather Musician summoned Orange Scallywag and said something; the latter nodded gravely and straightaway ran from the house. At once Zoya felt at ease.

Soon after the others began to jump up from underneath the feathers. They similarly gave themselves a good bird-like shake and smiled just as broadly at Zoya. The last to get up was Ginger Scallywag-in-a-Headscarf. She sprang up from under the feathers as if stung.

'I've lost my scarf,' she shouted. 'I've lost my scarf.'

'It's on your head, Gingernob,' Lilac Scallywag shouted back at her.

'I hung it on a tree before I went to sleep,' she wailed. 'Where's the tree?'

'Where it was before,' said Yellow Scallywag smiling. 'Just by Grandfather Musician.'

'Tell him to give me back my scarf.'

'But he hasn't got it.'

'He must have. Where is he?' cried Ginger Scallywag flying at Granddad. 'He was here a minute ago.'

'I'm still here, little one,' said the old man mildly, restraining her. 'Maybe you lost your scarf in your sleep!'

'There, you see,' said Ginger Scallywag, suddenly coming to a halt and laughing. 'If it weren't for Grandfather Musician, we wouldn't have to put up with all this nonsense.'

'But it was you who was looking for your scarf,' Yellow Scallywag reminded her, 'And it was on your head all the time.'

'Then why should I look for it if it's on my head?' cried Ginger Scallywag with a cheerful grin. And she took Zoya and Lilac Scallywag by their hands and ran with them out of the house. The others rushed off in pursuit.

Zoya stopped in the doorway with a shock: she was astonished at the scene that met her eyes. There was no sun at all, yet everything was lit up with a warm light—as if you were looking through an orange glass. Up in the bright orange sky the clouds seemed yellow; the leaves and blades of grass glittered moistly;

the dusty soil had turned a bright bricklike colour. All around was amazingly warm and gay.

'Do you like it?' asked Lilac Scallywag. 'Well, Zoya?'

'Yes,' she replied. 'I feel so light somehow.'

'It's always like that on an orange day.'

Just at that moment Orange Scallywag appeared on the path. He beckoned to Zoya as if to say his mission had been accomplished. And he clapped his hands,

'All of you, come here. Come on.'

CHAPTER EIGHT

CARNIVAL-TIME

Orange Scallywag had clapped his hands and uttered an order, and all came running to him.

'I've just been by the White Flower. It's stuffy for it: we're either asleep or running around while it's struggling to keep alive.'

'Did you forget to water the flower?' asked Zoya in a whisper of Lilac Scallywag standing beside her.

'Good Gracious, Zoya! He needs something different.'

And suddenly he gave a joyful shout.

'I've got it: let's ask Zoya, perhaps she'll sing us a song.'

Zoya was surprised. What had her singing got to do with it? In the meantime the scallywags were breathing more easily and jumping up and down.

'True. True. Go on, dear Zoya, please. Zoya, Zoya, give us a song.'

And straightaway Zoya fancied singing a song for them. She knew many songs, yet in her anxiety none would come to mind. In the end she had to make one up herself. She had done it before, but it now came out even better, since the scallywags took up the words and repeated them after her, giving Zoya time to think what to put next.

The day was cheerful, composing came easily to her and this is what resulted.



Zoya singing:

If I was a furry little squirrel
I'd hop along the branches of a tree
And when I'd reach my squirrel house
I'd roll up like a tiny mouse.

Scallywags taking it up:

How snug and warm I'd be.

Zoya singing:

If I was a teeny-weeny ant
I'd fetch and run throughout the livelong day
And when I'd reach my snug ant nest
I'd lie down and take a well-earned rest.

Scallywags take up the song:

And sleep the night away.

Zoya singing:

And if I was now in my Mother's place
I'd have no worries and I'd not be cross
Her daughter's gone
But she'll be home...

Thereupon Zoya hesitated, she couldn't think of what to say, then changed the last line herself somewhat wistfully:

It's not her fault she's missing...

That wasn't quite right; it didn't rhyme, so Zoya added under her breath:

'It's not my fault I'm lost.'

The scallywags fell silent. And Zoya felt they were sorry for her, which made her eyes smart. So that no one should notice she turned away.

Someone's hand stroked her hair. Zoya knew who it was, yet glanced sideways at him all the same. So it was: Lilac Scallywag was looking at her with sad eyes.

'Dear little Zoya,' he said and stroked her head as if she were a little child.

The others crowded round at once and also gazed with sympathy at their guest. Meanwhile Ginger Scallywag simply cried, hiding her reddened nose in her hands.

'Well I never: fancy not being able to cheer the little girl up,' she exclaimed with a sniff.

Zoya was more than a little uncomfortable that she has caused such gloom.

At that moment Orange Scallywag took the lead and clapped his hands.

'All of you, come here,' he shouted.

Heads turned towards him. Lilac Scallywag alone did not take his eyes off Zoya, and she nodded gratefully to him.

'Let's have a carnival,' suggested Orange Scallywag. 'Agreed?'

'Yes, yes,' they all cried. And they dashed off home taking Zoya by the hand with them.

'Come on. Come on,' they shouted. 'Perhaps you will get the flower mask.'

'Or the grey donkey.'

'Or the longest nose.'

Grandfather Musician rummaged in silence under the feathers and brought up a little wooden trunk; he opened it up, turned his back on the throng and reached inside.

'Who to?' he asked.

'Zoya,' several voices shouted back.

And Grandfather Musician handed her a small bundle wrapped in homespun cloth.

'Hide behind a bush and put it on so that no one will know you,' he whispered.

And so she did. She found herself wearing a tall hat patterned in multicoloured triangles; a high collar covered almost all her face, while voluminous overalls were so long that they even concealed her red boots.

Zoya looked about her: behind neighbouring bushes gleamed bright hats and masks, and soon it was impossible to say where was Yellow Scallywag, where Red, where Lilac or Blue. Only the

baby Pink Scallywag was easy to spot even though he had on a tall hat like a dunce's cap, a sausage-like nose, and he was bouncing up and down to make himself look taller. All of a sudden Zoya felt afraid: she had lost sight of Lilac Scallywag. And he was the dearest of the scallywags. Or, rather, he was *hers*, her very own scallywag... How would they now recognise each other? After all, Zoya was nothing like her normal self either.

The scallywags all ran into an open glade.

Someone took her by the hand. Zoya glanced round. In front of her was a flower mask. A hood of blue, pink and yellow petals flopped down to a nose, with little slits left for eyes. And then, suddenly, the eyes blinked and the figure let go of Zoya's hand.

'Oh,' came a voice from under the petals. 'Oh dear, oh dear. I must have left it in the bushes.'

And Ginger Scallywag—it was her of course—rushed off towards the bushes and pulled out a bow.

'I shall play for the White Flower,' she whispered to Zoya.

Zoya did not understand much about the White Flower, but she was keen to hear her new friend playing. In the meantime, the scallywags were running and skipping lightly across the glade.

'Why have we stayed here?' asked Ginger Scallywag in surprise.

'Perhaps we have to catch them up?' suggested Zoya.

'Yes, that's it,' said Ginger brightening up. 'You are Zoya, aren't you? I thought so: you have a very soft hand. And your voice is a bit different.'

'That's a good thing,' thought Zoya. 'I want to be recognised.'

They caught up the others. And now all of them wandered slowly through the grass and some sort of strange small flower stems. There was a pleasant fragrance in the orange air from these flowers. It was fresh and aromatic.

'Now where is Lilac Scallywag?' wondered Zoya. 'What if he didn't join us? It wouldn't be at all interesting without him.'

And just as if he had heard her, one of the scallywags looked round. And he nodded to her. He was dressed in green overalls;

a long sharp nose had completely transformed his face. 'I would never have known,' thought Zoya with a smile to herself. She was very pleased with Lilac Scallywag.

Lilac Scallywag relaxed too, he ran on farther jumping and skipping. They all moved lightly, and when they hurried they made little hops and skips.

'We are approaching the White Flower,' whispered Ginger Scallywag.

And Zoya remarked that Ginger was agitated.

In the light of orange day amidst the grass, the thick rough stem of the Flower stood out at once, and looked even taller and firmer.

'Orange Scallywag was wrong to worry about the Flower wilting,' thought Zoya. And instantly the boy in the green overalls turned to her and said,

'It was your song that helped.'

Again she did not understand and shrugged her shoulders. And she held on to Lilac Scallywag's hand so that he did not run off.

Stepping softly, the scallywags began to come closer to the Flower and, then, all at once, they bent their knees and sat down on the grass. Zoya sat down too. Flower stems, leaves and blossoms at once separated her from the others. Now she saw only the orange sky and the White Flower with its folded petals. 'I wonder whether it will open as before?' she wondered. Without knowing why, she waited with bated breath: as if expecting something exciting, like a holiday or a new doll.

She could not tear her eyes away from the Flower. And then, all of a sudden, she caught the sounds of gentle music. The music sounded like a whisper and came up from somewhere underground.

But from where?

Nearby blades of grass bent their heads, the tops of the fluffy little flowers waved to and fro: it was Ginger Scallywag moving her bow across the flower stems. Then she stood up and ran through the glade, stroking her bow across the tree trunks, the arms of bushes, flowers and leaves. It seemed that a whole





orchestra was playing. Blue, red and yellow specks whirled about the grass. They were transparent like little sunbeams. The scallywags sprang up and began to catch them in their clumsy hands. So did Zoya, running hither and thither; a little ray darted up and hid again under some leaves in the grass. The coloured specks seemed to be dancing, and Zoya and the scallywags began to move in time with music. Zoya felt herself being swept up, one moment floating in the air, the next landing on the ground; she spread wide her arms so as to whirl about more easily. Thereupon the little coloured ray settled on her outstretched hand and remained there long like a warm little speck. Zoya brought her hand to her face and heard a little ring. It was like a crystal bell ringing: ting-ting-a-ling.

Then the musical speck flew away and the flying dance came to an end. Ginger Scallywag had dropped her bow.

It was then that the White Flower shook itself on its thick stem. Its little green bowl trembled and strong green little feet pushed out.

Straightening itself up and gathering invisible strength, the magnificent White Flower made its entrance and stood proudly waving in the warm orange air.

Now Zoya had eyes only for the Flower. As for herself, she felt she was a blade of grass one moment, then the branch of a bush and, next moment, a bird looking down from a tree through transparent yellow eyes.

'It's coming, yes it's coming,' sang inside her head.
What's closed is opening
What's forbidden is allowing
Something tender is unfolding
Something bright and beautiful...

CHAPTER NINE

A HARD DAY

Zoya was awoken by Grandfather's voice,
'Our greetings to the yellow day.'

And instantly the cry was taken up from all around,

'May it pass more quickly.'

Zoya was baffled: why should they want the day to hasten by? Perhaps it would be just as good as the orange day. But as she peered from out of her feather-bed at the scallywags, she realised it would not be so: they were all pale and sickly as if unwell. They all rose slowly, nobody laughed, nobody sang. Ginger Scallywag was looking for her scarf again, but in silence this time, while the little Scallywag in the pink cap was even whimpering, burying his head in the lap of Grandfather Musician.

Zoya could not comprehend what was going on. She began to feel sorry for these defenceless scallywags, and she too fell silent. And of course, her mood was immediately felt by Lilac Scallywag with his strange powers of perception. He came to her and squatted down beside her.

'Are you unwell?' he asked.

'No,' Zoya replied.

'Gloomy?'

'No. It's just that I don't understand why you are all so ... well ... peculiar.'

'You see, Zoya,' he said, 'the yellow day is a hard day.'

'Why?'

'I'm not sure how to explain...' Lilac Scallywag lowered his eyes. 'We somehow depend on the colour. Perhaps that's what Mister Painter intended.'

Zoya stroked the Scallywag's roughened hand.

'What's going to happen now?'

'Next comes the green day. That's fun.'

'How do you know?'

'It always is.'

'It's strange all the same...' said Zoya. And she felt that she too was somehow not her normal self. Only she did not know at once what it was. Lilac Scallywag noticed it too.

'You see, the yellow day is working on you as well.'

'No, dear little Scallywag, no, it's not that... You know, I ... am terribly hungry. Absolutely famished.'

'Oh my Goodness!' he exclaimed. 'What a thoughtless creature I am. I quite forgot. Grandfather Musician told me this could happen.'

'What might happen?'

'That you would feel like eating.'

'But don't you ... eat?'

'We do, but we don't have to. But you have to eat. Hold on, I'll fetch you some pink grass berries.'

Lilac Scallywag scampered off down the track towards the woods and soon was back with a handful of pink round and hard fruit looking like nuts.

Zoya popped one into her mouth and bit at it. It tasted as if she were chewing on cotton wool. Zoya was nonplussed: it was quite impossible to swallow, but she could hardly spit it out.

'Don't you like it?' asked Lilac Scallywag in surprise. 'Don't you like it at all? What would you like then?'

'I like pears,' said Zoya. 'Or strawberries. I'd like some bread, that's it. Bread!'

Lilac Scallywag was puzzled.

'I don't know what that is. We don't have that. We never have.'

'What's the matter?' asked Yellow Scallywag coming up.

'She wants some ... what is it? Bread. And ... what else? Straw... Wellies...'

'Strawberries,' said Zoya correcting him.

'What's that?'

'I don't know how to explain,' said Zoya lost. 'It's a sort of berry.'

'Draw it,' said Yellow Scallywag. 'You do know how to draw, don't you?'

'But I never told anyone I could draw,' said Zoya.

'Well, I know,' exclaimed Yellow Scallywag, puffing out his chest and thrusting one foot forward; and he added in a mock serious tone: 'The yellow day is mine, and I am very good at understanding everything and knowing everything on that day.'

In fact, he was the liveliest of them all. Zoya smiled, but did not wish to quarrel with him. She took her sketchbook from her

pocket, and her pencil, and she began to draw a strawberry, just like the one she had once seen on a transfer.

'And do you really wish to eat it?' asked Yellow Scallywag.

'This one here? Oh no,' said Zoya shaking her head. 'But I do fancy some real strawberries or a pear.'

'You won't get anywhere by saying "real",' said Yellow Scallywag severely. 'Did anyone ever teach you to draw?'

'I ... I taught myself. But most of all I want to draw like Uncle Tadeus,' she said. And Zoya blushed: it was rather embarrassing to bask in the glory of a famous relative.

The scallywags were silent as if they had not noticed anything. Then Yellow Scallywag spoke up gravely, but very softly so as not to hurt her,

'Mister Painter created all that you see around you. You cannot do the same, and nobody can. You have to do it differently.'

'But how?' asked Zoya.

'I don't know,' he said. And suddenly he gave a guilty smile. 'I just don't know.'

Yellow Scallywag thought long and hard before pronouncing.

'Let's try the following. Make out as if this ... strerry ... bawstry...'

'Strawberry,' Zoya had to say again.

'Yes, yes, strawberry, as if it is very tasty and that it is very nice to eat.'

'And ripe?' added Zoya, her mouth watering. 'And juicy?'

'Naturally.'

'And what then?'

'And then pick it from the page, that's all.'

Zoya stared at Yellow Scallywag in amazement, then at Lilac Scallywag, and from the look in their eyes she realised they were serious.

'Let's leave Zoya to draw,' said Lilac Scallywag, and with that they left the house.

So Zoya drew another strawberry. This one had dots clearly drawn over its skin, it had a little stem and broad leaf. But it

wasn't quite right; even if she were to take the berry out of the page it certainly would not be very pleasant to eat. Even for a hungry person like Zoya. So she set to drawing some bread. This turned out to be even harder, though it was a good likeness. Yes, it certainly was very like a loaf of bread.

Then she went out of doors. All around it was quiet, with no wind and somehow empty. It was neither hot nor cold. 'I hope this day will pass quickly,' Zoya thought and remembered the words of the morning greeting: 'Our greetings to the yellow day.' Yes, yes, let's hope it passes quickly. She made her way along the path and suddenly heard someone talking. By now she had learned to distinguish the different voices. It was Yellow Scallywag talking,

'Is it true that if she doesn't eat, she will fall and never get up?'

'Yes, that's what Grandfather Musician said,' replied Lilac Scallywag, his voice shaking in alarm. 'Surely we can do something? It's your day today. Think something up. Help her.'

'She has to help herself,' answered Yellow Scallywag. 'There's nothing I can do.'

'Zoya!' shouted Lilac Scallywag to her as if she were sick or a little child. 'Zoya!'

But Zoya had run away. She hid in the bushes and buried her face in her hands. What would happen now? What next? Surely she wouldn't die of hunger and never see Mother again? And Aunt Janina... And even Luba Vilkina. Perhaps Aunt Janina was right to worry and clasp her hands, saying, 'How is our young girl going to fare in this world?' She had said that when Zoya had refused to go for a loaf of bread, fearing that she wouldn't be given any; she was shy of going outside in her new jacket and trousers. But Zoya could draw. She would always think to herself: *'I can draw anyway.'* And suddenly it seemed that she was not that good after all...

'Not so good, am I?' Zoya asked herself. 'Do you think I can't draw my own hand?'

And she took out her pencil and sketchbook and drew it.

'How about that leaf?'

She drew that too.

'And that tree over there? The Scallywag house? My house?'

Zoya used up almost all the sketchbook, and she got better and better. 'So I can't draw, can I?' she addressed herself to Aunt Janina and Lilac Scallywag. And she drew a room. It was her Mother's room—with the sofa, painting, the little table by the window. A glass bowl stood on the table. A wonderful juicy orange appeared in the glass bowl, like the one she had ate last winter. A pear lay next to it. It lay lopsidedly because it was bumpy. Zoya liked it that way.

How about a pie? As if Zoya didn't know what a cabbage pie was and how to decorate it with onion flakes on top. There you are, delightful! How about a glass vase alongside, with flowers—all sorts of golden buttercups, white and pink daisies, sky-blue cornflowers; and then she would draw that old moth-eared neighbour's cat on a chair! No, on second thoughts, she didn't need the cat: he was bound to steal the pie. He wasn't to know it had cabbage inside.

Zoya burst out laughing. While she was chuckling to herself she did not notice the pear falling from the bowl to the table, and then rolling into her lap. She snatched it up.

'Food, food!' she exclaimed so loudly that she frightened Ginger Scallywag out of her skin; the poor girl rushed back the way she had come, flew indoors and blurted out to Lilac Scallywag,

'The girl wants some food. Can't you think of something to save her from torment. Give yourself a good shake and rack your brains.'

'I am... We are...' stuttered Lilac Scallywag.

Meanwhile Zoya was proudly marching towards them carrying a wonderful juicy pear in her hand.

'Food! I did it... Try it, have a bite, all of you,' she said, forgetting her own hunger.

Lilac Scallywag took a bite and froze. He could hardly spit it out, but he certainly couldn't eat that... No, no, let Zoya eat it if she liked.

Zoya was much surprised at the difference in tastes. And she sank her teeth into the juicy fruit of the pear.

Zoya ate the pear with relish, the juice running down her cheeks and chin. She was so relieved she would not now die of hunger, glad she had learned finally to draw well... Yet something prevented her from being completely happy. Something nagged at her. What was it? In fact, it must sound strange to admit it:

Zoya felt someone *looking* at her.

Of course, the scallywags and even Grandfather Musician were all looking at her, right enough, smiling and nodding their heads happily.

It wasn't that.

Zoya felt someone looking at her *secretly*. On the sly.

But she shook her head. 'Nonsense. Nonsense.'

As soon as the sweetish sharp smell of the White Flower wafted to them, the scallywags all gathered indoors and buried themselves in the feathers. Grandfather Musician drew his bow over the branch of the household tree, singing,

Bedtime, dreamtime,
Of fir and pine,
Of dangling vine,
Of riverside,
Of changing tide.
Birdie sleeps,
Donkey sleeps.
All that's yet to come—
Now sleeps.
What we know not—sleeps,
What we care not—sleeps,
Nor need we
Weep, weep,
We must
Sleep, sleep...

 Soon everyone was asleep.

CHAPTER TEN

ON THE ISLAND

They ran along the little narrow path trampled down through the grass in the green light of day under a green sky. It was merry and bright. Zoya was surprised to find herself depending on the colour. But it was pleasant. They ran along, and above them the branches with their broad thick leaves spread out and intertwined. A leaf broke free and circled through the air to land upon the path. Zoya picked it up. Its stem was thick and it had a glossy smooth surface with veins and arteries running all over it, like a human hand. 'Perhaps it is alive, this tree?' she thought. 'I wonder if it can see and hear? Or speak maybe, only I don't understand anything?'

'Are you tired?' Zoya heard. Lilac Scallywag appeared beside her.

'I was thinking,' she said, nodding towards the tree, 'I was wondering whether it is alive?'

Lilac Scallywag stared at her amazed.

'No, no, what nonsense,' muttered Zoya embarrassed.

'What do you mean nonsense?' asked Lilac Scallywag once more astonished, 'Do you really not know trees are alive?'

'How can that be?' exclaimed Zoya coming to a halt.

'Very simple. They are cold, hot, ill, cosy. They grow. They die...'

'And can they talk?'

'Yes, of course.'

'Well, go and talk to one of them,' said Zoya. 'Please, dear little Scallywag.'

The boy said nothing; then he spoke ever so gently, so as not to offend her,

'Zoya, I cannot do that.'

'Don't you know how?'

'I do. We have a talk when it is very, very necessary. But just like that, for amusement, I mustn't. It's hard for them, you know.'

Zoya was so used to Lilac Scallywag obeying her every whim; and now he was suddenly stubborn. She was terribly hurt. Almost reduced to tears. And then she went and cried. This time Scallywag did not do as he usually did—stroke her hair and comfort her. He stood silently looking at her. Then he spoke softly and very politely once more,

'Excuse me, Zoya, but I think you are acting rather badly.'

'There's nothing bad about it,' she blurted out, covering her face with her hands. 'What's bad about it?'

'You can see very well that I don't want to, and if I am unwilling that means I cannot do it. I'll do anything for you that I am able to, even without you asking.'

'Why can't you do it?' asked Zoya, not quite so insistently this time, although she was interested to hear him talking with the tree.

'Because it's hard on the tree. Even hurts it. Now if you were to force a bird to walk along the ground instead of flying...'

'Well, it certainly can,' she broke in.

'Yes, but it's hard for it. Why force someone to do something that is hard, especially just for fun?'

Zoya remembered the trained animals at the circus. They had to be forced. And suddenly she remembered how she had always felt sorry for those trained bears, tigers and elephants—as if they were being insulted and humiliated.

'Ah, yes,' she said nodding her head. 'You're right, don't do it.' And now it was her turn to look tenderly and beggingly into Lilac Scallywag's eyes.

'I hope you aren't angry?' she said.

No, Lilac Scallywag was not angry. Perhaps he had no idea how to get upset anyway. Zoya was so glad of that.

They were standing just by the bush under which Zoya had yesterday taken the pear from her sketchbook page. She glanced under the bush. A page still lay there. It had a drawing of her Mother's room, the table, glass bowl and oranges in it. But there was no sign of the pie. All the same the grass was littered with little crumbs.

'Oh my!' cried Zoya.

'What's up?' said Lilac Scallywag, uncomprehending.

But she could not explain instantly what it was. Zoya was in dismay, then brightened up, and then dismayed again.

First she was in dismay that someone had eaten the pie. It would have come in very handy at that moment.

Then she had the idea that since someone had eaten it she must have made it look real and drawn it cleverly. That was bound to buck her up.

And then her spirits fell once more because she was sure the scallywags never took anything without permission.

'Tell me,' she said, 'does anyone here ever take anything without asking permission?'

'Nevverrr,' Scallywag answered very precisely. And from his wide eyes it was clear he was speaking the truth.

'But someone was...' And Zoya fell silent. In any case Lilac Scallywag himself caught sight of the piece of something strange. He put the pie to his nose, then turned away and sneezed. 'No, Zoya,' he said, 'none of us could possibly have eaten that.'

And again Zoya had the feeling someone was secretly watching her from behind the trees.

But Lilac Scallywag took her hand and led her on.

The path suddenly fell away and there, below, was a stream under a steep sandy outcrop. No stairs or paths led down to it. 'How on earth do they get down there?' wondered Zoya. And almost at once she saw something surprising: Green Scallywag was standing at the very edge of the incline, he had bent back his arms in a funny way, squatted down and suddenly launched himself into a jump. He flew lightly just like a grasshopper. He sailed over the stream and landed on a little island. Only now did Zoya notice that there was an island overgrown with bushes in the middle of the stream.

The other scallywags jumped after Green. Most agile of all was the scallywag in the pink cap: he sailed through the air with the greatest of ease; he had only learned recently and he was keen to show off his ability. Only Ginger Scallywag remained behind with Zoya. She too pressed her arms to her sides, but





then she realised she could not jump because she was holding the bow in her hands.

'I'm scared of breaking the bow if I jump,' she said.

'Then leave it here,' said Zoya.

'But what would it do here without me?' asked Ginger Scallywag in surprise. Then she waved her hand, indicating to the bow to go ahead and jump if it wished.

'Surely it can't jump,' Zoya thought to herself, unable to believe her eyes.

'What? The bow?' said Ginger Scallywag in annoyance. 'The bow jump?'

At that she burst out laughing: 'Ha, ha, ha. What a joke. The bow jump... I'd better jump myself.'

She lay the bow in the grass and easily leapt across the stream.

'Zoya, come down here,' she heard someone calling her down below.

'I can't,' she called back.

Then Ginger Scallywag began to shout to the others.

'What's the matter with you? Have you any brains? The girl has stayed behind on the bank through my bow, to stop the wind blowing it away, while you are rushing around here like scalded cats without a thought for her. Fancy leaving such a bow without giving it a dip in the water ... or rather such a breeze ... or rather such a girl!'

'You've mixed everything up again, Gingernob,' Yellow Scallywag laughed. He took a short run, lifted up his arms, squatted and ... and in no time at all had leapt up to the high bank.

Lilac Scallywag did the same. Then they took Zoya one by the right hand, the other by the left, and they easily flew across the stream together.

'Oh dear,' cried Zoya, 'I'm frightened.'

But her fear soon passed, even though the water was directly below her, since they held her tight. It was a tremendous jump and very exact, and they landed right in the centre of the island. All the scallywags had gathered there and now came running up to Zoya.

'Look what we've got here,' cried Pink Scallywag.

He wanted to show something off. But Zoya saw nothing save thick, ever so thick bushes. And she stared expectantly at the scallywag. He was exceedingly tiny, that Pink Scallywag. And his eyes were round and bright. Now Zoya was able to distinguish the scallywags by more than the colour of their caps. It was only at first glance that they all seemed to be alike. In fact they were all quite different. Similar, yet different.

Zoya wanted to call Pink Scallywag by some pet name.

'Dear little Scallywag,' she said. 'Dear little Scallywag, I just don't understand anything.'

'Just a minute, just a minute and you'll see,' he cried gaily waving his arms about. 'Make your way over here.' And he led her through the undergrowth. All at once Zoya spotted the hut. Dense, green, sweet-scented. It had been woven by wattling branches rather than cutting them. And how? Very simply: the branches of three bushes had been linked above a glade and plaited at the top. Neither axe, nor knife, nor rope had been used. After her conversation with Lilac Scallywag, Zoya knew why this had happened.

The light in the hut was even greener from the leaves. And it was quite cool. The scallywags were very quiet, only their wide round eyes glittered.

Quietly drawing aside the leaves, the Little Grey Donkey poked out his head.

'Come in and join us,' called Green Scallywag.

And the Little Donkey did so.

'He lives here, on the island,' Orange Scallywag told Zoya.

'Can he swim?' she asked.

'Of course. He is calling us to have a swim.'

The Little Donkey put his warm soft nose on Zoya's shoulder. Zoya stroked the Donkey and, as she did so, something pleasant turned round in her head, a little ditty...

When you come to a stranger's abode,
See you treat it right:
Obey and do as you are told,
Give no offence or slight...

'I shall never, never harm you, never make you sad...' thought Zoya.

The scallywags were sitting leaning back, resting their hands on the ground and stretching out their legs. They were the same height as Zoya, but were quite different: for one thing they did not know how to get cross. And Zoya suddenly felt a grown-up alongside them: 'I shall never harm you...'

'Let's go and have a swim,' Green Scallywag called to them all.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

A STRANGE FIND

Swimming is enjoyable, especially if it isn't simply swimming, but means diving, splashing, ducking and racing as well. The scallywags jumped into the stream just as they were: in their clothes and caps. But how wonderfully they could swim. As for Zoya, she could only swim a bit, just enough to keep afloat. So she was the first to swim to the bank, dry herself, pick up her sketchbook and pencil and set to drawing.

She did not feel so much like eating today in the bright bold light of green day. Her drawing went well. She prepared apples, pears, yet another pie for herself and put them all under the bush to take with her on her return.

Zoya nibbled at an apple as she watched the scallywags swimming, splashing about and laughing. The Little Grey Donkey was there too, only he bathed slightly farther out from the bank; and then, Zoya did not even notice when, he came out of the water and hid somewhere in the bushes. She began to look for the Little Donkey and suddenly caught sight of something: the ripples of the river were bringing a rope to the bank. It was precisely the skipping rope with which Luba and that bushy-haired girl Nina had played. The rope lay on the sand with one wooden handle bobbing up and down in the water.

Luba would surely shout now: 'Begs I go first!', grab the skipping rope and take it home or hide it in her pocket. But

Zoya would never do that. And she suggested to the scallywags now,

'Shall we skip?'

Yellow Scallywag pulled himself out onto the bank, shook himself and began to skip up and down so that he reached the topmost branches of the thicket.

The other scallywags jumped likewise. But without the skipping rope.

Zoya took the skipping rope and began to skip neatly, treading down the moist sand. Then she handed one end to Ginger Scallywag and showed her how to turn it, run in and out of the rope.

Lilac Scallywag was the first to hop into the rotating circle. He jumped so high that Zoya and Ginger Scallywag had time to turn the rope three times before he came back to earth. Zoya could never have done that. On the other hand, they were not as clever as she was at skipping.

'I want to go too,' shouted Pink Scallywag.

'Come on, then, dear little Scallywag,' called Zoya.

And he too hopped very high.

'And me,' cried Ginger Scallywag.

She bounced up while holding one end of the rope, but when the rope grew taut it jerked Ginger down and she fell sprawling on the sand.

'Now that's most amazing,' she exclaimed, shaking herself. 'I can jump higher than all of them even without the rope, yet something pulled me back.' She was very upset.

'Oh, dear Ginger, you're the best jumper,' Yellow Scallywag told her. 'If only you didn't get everything mixed up.'

'I never get things mixed up,' answered Ginger Scallywag. 'This is a rope for jumping high.'

Zoya listened in amazement. Finally she ventured to ask,

'Haven't you really ever skipped before with a skipping rope?'

'No,' Lilac Scallywag replied. 'Never.'

'Then where did you get this skipping rope?'

'Where did we get it?' they all shouted in surprise. 'We thought you brought it with you.'





No, Zoya had not brought it. Could it be it had been in her pocket all the time and had fallen out when she had crossed the stream with the scallywags?

CHAPTER TWELVE

ALARM

All was quiet in the little cabin. Grandfather Musician was about to play the Change of Day Song; the weary scallywags watched him expectantly with bleary eyes.

But for some reason the old man was taking his time.

His movements were somehow jerky and he had a wary look upon his face.

Zoya too became restless. She knew not why. But everyone was silent. And so was she.

'Gingernob, where's the bow?' Grandfather Musician suddenly asked.

'Here... I mean there... Oh dear. I seem to have left it on the riverbank.'

A whisper of alarm ran through the house. There *had* to be the Change of Day Song!

'Never mind,' said Granddad softly. 'It can be helped.'

'What else could there be?' Zoya wished to ask. She felt there was something more to it.

Yellow Scallywag and Ginger ran down to the riverside.

'Me too,' shouted Pink Scallywag, jumping up.

'No,' said Granddad strictly—rather too strictly, Zoya thought.

From afar came the heady fragrance of the White Flower. It was weaker and not the same as it was normally. Somehow mixed with something bitter. Why?

Zoya noticed Grandfather Musician look up and fall to musing about something. The scallywags were silent, just like trees and grass before a storm.

How on earth could they have forgotten the bow? Zoya could

well recall Green and Orange scallywags leaping with her from the island to the high bank and Ginger Scallywag being there already. But they were all so worn out from swimming and skipping. It was only by the house that Zoya said to Lilac Scallywag,

'I've forgotten all my food on the island—the pears, and apples and pies.'

'I'll fetch them,' said Lilac Scallywag.

But Zoya could not remember anything about the bow. She wasn't much good at looking after them, after all.

Just then Ginger Scallywag rushed into the house. She had forgotten her scarf and her hair was all ruffled and matted.

'No,' she gasped, out of breath. 'The bow isn't there.'

Behind her dashed in Yellow Scallywag.

'Someone's crying on the island,' he said.

The scallywags all jumped up, ran down to the river clattering along in their wooden clogs.

'Yes, yes, I felt it,' whispered Grandfather Musician. (Zoya was running alongside him, so she felt safer.) 'We've never had anything like this before,' he continued, shaking his head. 'Nevverrr!'

Thereupon they heard a cry. It came from somewhere down below. It was tired and hoarse; perhaps its owner was sick or maybe even...

'Perhaps he's drowning,' said Zoya; she herself, to tell the truth, was afraid of water.

'We never drown,' Grandfather Musician said to her swiftly. They were now standing on the high bank.

Yellow Scallywag was the first to jump.

'Here,' he shouted from below. 'Someone had tied him to a tree.'

'What's he saying?' asked Ginger puzzled. 'How can you tie a boy up?'

Zoya said nothing, but for some reason recalled her skipping rope—she had left that too on the island.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

HOW IT ALL TURNED OUT

'Yes, yes, that's exactly as it was,' Lilac Scallywag was recounting when they had all gathered on the little island and were sitting there having a little rest and calming down. 'That's exactly as it was.'

He had gone back to the stream for Zoya's provisions. And when he was about to jump someone had grabbed him from behind, put his hands over Scallywag's eyes and clung to his back.

'Jump!' a voice had said. 'Go on, jump!'

That *somebody* was heavy; Scallywag jumped and fell short of the island, dropping into the water. He was frightened and surprised—that had never happened to him before. He had not shouted out, and made no attempt to resist; he just swam across the stream while that *someone* sitting on his back was giving orders,

'To the left. Leftwards. Now a bit to the right.'

His eyes had then been bound with something, and he was unable to see a thing.

When Scallywag had gained the island, he had been dragged to a tree and tied to it. With the skipping rope. And then he had been told,

'Sit still and keep quiet. Otherwise you'll be running off and moaning. Tell-tit. And don't be scared, no one's going to hit you.' And then that *someone* had begun to rummage about in the bushes, and eat something—chewing and munching.

'What did it eat?' asked Grandfather Musician. 'There isn't any pink grass on the island.'

'I left some apples there,' replied Zoya. 'Apples and strawberries. And a pie.'

'What's that?' asked Orange Scallywag.

But just then Pink Scallywag jumped out of the bushes.

'The Little Donkey has vanished somewhere. He always sleeps on the island at change of day. That's right, Granddad?'

They began to search and shout. The Little Donkey was nowhere to be seen. Ginger Scallywag suddenly burst into bitter tears. She wiped away the tears with the ends of her scarf, but they continued to flow and course down her cheeks.

'What a to-do!' she moaned. 'Tied one up. Carried the other off. Led yet another away. How can such a terrible thing ever happen?'

'Look for the bow,' said Grandfather Musician. He slowly got up and got ready to jump. 'Find it straightaway.'

He continued to look warily around, peering about him at the White Flower and breathing in its scent: it was somehow stronger and more bitter here.

'Now I remember where I left it,' shouted Ginger Scallywag wiping her eyes; and she was the first to leap to the bank.

'And I know where the Little Donkey is,' said Lilac Scallywag quietly, as if to himself. 'The one ... well, that person ... who captured me ... probably *he* crossed back over the stream on the Donkey. He can't swim, you see.'

'Then why didn't he jump?' asked Green Scallywag.

'Because he can't jump...' Lilac Scallywag said and broke off, looking round fearfully.

'What? Not at all?'

'Impossible,' the others intoned.

Both Yellow and Orange scallywags took hold of Zoya—since she too could not jump—and shortly they were all on the high bank.

Lilac Scallywag hardly made the bank. He was trembling all over and trying to avoid everybody's gaze; his head was withdrawn into his shoulders as if he was guilty of something.

Grandfather Musician came up to him, put his arms round him and held him close.

'The lad has discovered what fear is,' he said, turning to Zoya, as if she was the eldest. 'It is very dangerous and bad.'

And he looked into Lilac Scallywag's eyes.

'I... Zoya and I,' he said softly, 'we shall do all we can to help you forget.'





At that moment there came a cry. It was just like a wild beast caught in a trap or a bird caught by a predator...

But it wasn't a beast or a bird. It was Ginger Scallywag. She was on her knees a little way off, bending over the ground and rocking from side to side.

'Is it the bow broken?' suggested Grandfather Musician, hurrying over to the girl. 'Don't cry, don't cry, I'll make a new...' And he suddenly fell silent.

The White Flower lay on the sand. Its head had been pressed by a stone, while the stem was hanging down at right-angles just short of the water. The slender petals were already shrivelling up, were exuding a bitterish smell and were quite brittle. And nearby, across the sandy glade, there was a clear trail of footsteps...

They were made by wedge-heeled shoes.

Zoya stood rooted to the spot: they were the marks of her shoes.

'I left the bow here...' sobbed Ginger Scallywag. 'And in its place ... I find... this.'

The scallywags were quiet. Grandfather Musician bent over the Flower, lifted its limp head.

'Perhaps we can take the Flower to the glade?' someone suggested.

'Or sing to it?'

'May it be still...?'

'It can't be saved...' said Grandfather Musician quietly, though everyone heard him. He straightened up, his eyes no longer so trusting. 'I would like to know,' he murmured even more quietly, 'I would like to know *who* did this.'

The scallywags glanced about them.

'*And I shall tell you what to do,*' said Granddad. 'Everyone stand at the edge of the glade and make your footprint in the sand.'

Straightaway the scallywags did so. When Zoya went to put her foot down, Lilac Scallywag quietly pulled her back.

'Not you, Zoya,' he said.

'Why not?' she asked.

'Not you,' Lilac Scallywag said again.

And Zoya suddenly understood.

'Do you really think it was me who crushed it?' she said. 'That's it, isn't it?'

And she pressed her foot down firmly into the sand as hard as she could, leaving an imprint of her wedge heel. Then she buried her face in her hands and stepped aside.

The scallywags stood in silence.

Zoya suddenly noticed Lilac Scallywag kneeling awkwardly beside her. He alone looked at Zoya, looked her straight in the eyes kindly and devotedly.

'I know it wasn't you, honest I do,' he said softly. 'But I feel such a pain here.' And he pressed his hand to his heart. 'It hurts so much.'

'It's not my fault,' said Zoya. 'It hurts me too.'

'Yes? You too?' echoed Lilac Scallywag. 'That's because you've become like us. And we cannot live without the White Flower.

'It's not my fault,' Zoya repeated. Then she added very quietly, 'Only who's going to believe me?'

Meanwhile the scallywags were still standing around in silence; then they gradually made their way home. Grandfather Musician walked in front.

No one said a word to Zoya, said for her to come along. Neither her, nor Lilac Scallywag.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

ALL IS LOST

It suddenly grew dark. Then the darkness gave way to a bright yellow light... No, not quite. It wasn't that the darkness gave way; it was that out of the darkness a yellow tree stretched forth its yellow branches, and the sky around it, and the grass beneath it, and the stream—all turned yellow. After that everything turned blue: the stream, the tree, the grass... Then the same thing happened in green. Faster and faster... Soon colours flashed by as on a faulty television screen. And a dry crackling took the place of the music which sounded at change

of day. Zoya screwed up her eyes, hoping that what seemed to be happening would pass. But it didn't. It continued.

Lilac Scallywag seized Zoya's hand and pulled her towards the house. They ran fast with all the various colours flashing round them like lightning. Flash! Blue track, blue sand, blue grass. Flash! Red bushes, red trees. Flash! And so on.

'If only Granddad could play...' said Scallywag out of breath. 'Then they could blend together: the colours and the music.'

But there was no sense talking about it. Grandfather could not play anything without the bow. And the flashing got faster and faster.

Flash! Flash! Orange tree, orange hut. Flash! Flash! Green door...

Then all of a sudden Zoya spotted the bow standing by the door. It was standing there leaning against the wall. Someone had brought it and left it there. It had been returned.

The girl picked it up and ran with the bow into the house.

The scallywags lay face downwards in the feather nest. The old man sat there, covering his eyes with gnarled fingers. Zoya put the bow into his hand. The old man glanced up vacantly and carried it to the trunk of the tree. There resounded the same old wistful, though tender music. It somehow blotted out the crackling. The flashing grew less and less, the colours lost their brilliance. Zoya heaved a sigh of relief. She snuggled up to the old man, laying her head against his dry hard shoulder, gazing into his round, wide-open eyes.

'Grandfather,' she implored. 'Grandfather, I didn't pick the Flower. Please believe me...'

The old man answered her without ceasing his playing,

'We're in deep trouble, Zoya. But I do believe you.'

Zoya understood: he was just saying that out of kindness. And once more she murmured,

'But why then were there footprints from my shoes? Eh? It surely was my shoes with the wedge heels.'

Grandfather Musician put aside his bow, and fell to thinking.

'Yes. It was your footprint all right. All the same I do believe you.'

Flash! A bright blue colour exploded before them and everything turned blue. Flash! Bright red. Flash! Flash!

It was because Grandfather Musician had stopped playing.

Once more he put his bow to the tree and again the colours receded. Lilac Scallywag signalled Yellow and they left the hut together.

'Grandfather,' whispered Zoya in the meantime, 'what are we to do? You can't go on playing for ever. I want to help. Let's think of something.'

The old man mournfully shrugged his shoulders.

Just at that moment Yellow and Lilac scallywags rushed breathless into the house.

'It's not her footmarks,' cried Lilac Scallywag.

And Yellow repeated,

'It's not hers, not Zoya's footprints.'

When they had got their breath back they began to explain,

'We measured them—where Zoya walked alongside us—her marks are small. These are similar, though bigger. A good deal bigger.'

'And see what we have found,' said Lilac Scallywag opening his fist.

Everyone rushed to take a look.

'It's a beetle's wing,' said one scallywag.

'A pinecone husk!' exclaimed another.

'A dried-up leaf!' cried a third.

Zoya took a look too. Something very familiar lay in the rough palm of Lilac Scallywag—it was semi-transparent, grey, with a black smudge like a cat.

Zoya stepped closer. She took the semi-transparent wrapper from Lilac's hand and in the flashing light read the familiar letters:

TOFFEE

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE TRAP

Now Zoya knew what to do. She sat down by the door, placed her sketchbook on her knees and began to draw.

Lilac Scallywag peered over her shoulder, asking,

'Are you hungry, Zoya?'

The girl gave no reply. She drew a pear, an apple and a pie, picked them from the page and hastened from the house. She hurried down to the stream. The Flower no longer lay in the sandy glade. When the scallywags had left they had probably taken it with them. But the tracks remained. There were the wooden clogs of the scallywags; there were her own, Zoya's footmarks, and near at hand, by the incline, she saw who had walked by, the person who had crushed the White Flower with the stone—Luba Vilkina!

'Ooh, you wait!' thought Zoya. 'You've got to smash and spoil everything, haven't you. What did you kill the Flower for? Why? And with a stone!' Zoya remembered the poor little flower stem hanging over the sandy outcrop far from the water. And suddenly she understood: yes, that's it, Luba wanted to cross over to the island. But why? What on earth for? Zoya had left the food there. After all, Luba couldn't draw—where would she get food from? It was her, of course, who had ate the pie. And it was her who had seized the scallywag to cross to the island. She had realised the stem was not long enough, so she had grabbed hold of Lilac Scallywag. And now Zoya understood about the Little Donkey: Luba had ridden on him after crossing over from the island. She had snatched up the bow as well; and then, when the lights had started flashing, she had returned it, since she too had suffered from the lights. Only why had she needed it? Perhaps she had wished to learn to play, like Ginger?

'You rotten spoilsport, Luba!' thought Zoya. 'Right. I'll soon fix it so you won't hurt anybody again.'

And Zoya set to scraping the soft riverside sand to dig a pit.

It was quite easy to dig a hole at first, then the sand lay hard and resisted her fingers. All the same she managed to dig a fairly deep hole. It was a good thing Zoya had thought earlier of digging the hole within reach of a long branch. She now bent the branch down to the ground and weighed the end down with sand so that it wouldn't straighten out and bounce back up.

When her work was over, Zoya pulled herself out of the pit by the branch and pulled the branch over to the other side. Only then did she look about her. The air was pinkish, sometimes streaked by other colours—lilac, blue, orange; but they did not change so sharply. In the distance she could hear music, and she recognised the tune: it was Ginger Scallywag who had played it on the day of the carnival. That meant that Ginger had taken over from Grandfather Musician. But for how long could they keep it up?

Zoya began to hurry. She tossed all her food to the bottom of the pit: the apple, pear and pie. 'Eat it up, Luba, my dear!' Greedy Luba would jump down into the pit and not be able to climb out. That was the whole point of her work.

But that wasn't all. No matter how long Luba sat at the bottom of the hole—even for a hundred years—the White Flower would not come back to life. Neither the scallywags, nor even Grandfather Musician himself knew how to bring it back to life. But Zoya ... she would have a go.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

A GOOD TRY

'Mister Painter brought us here. He created all that you see around you,' Yellow Scallywag had told her once.

'The painter lives on in his paintings,' Mother had said.

'In this one too?' Zoya had asked.

'Certainly,' Mother had said.

And in the evening, with the curtains drawn, Zoya had seen

for herself, had seen very clearly: in the right-hand corner of the picture—probably very far off—a house gleamed white. From afar it looked like a toy-house. One little window shone with light.

Zoya clapped her hands.

'Little Donkey!' she cried. And she knew the Donkey would come because it was now her day, even though she didn't have a cap on her head. Simply today she was stronger than all the others.

And sure enough: the bushes rustled and then she heard snapping and the clatter of hoofs: the Little Grey Donkey emerged into the clearing. He recognised her and extended his trusting head towards Zoya.

'Help me, Little Donkey,' she begged. 'Help me to cross to the other bank. You see, I can't jump like the scallywags, and I can't swim.'

The Little Donkey rubbed his back up against Zoya's side. Perhaps he had not understood her words, but Zoya knew he trusted her. Zoya climbed onto his back as he rocked back on his hind legs and leapt lightly over the stream. Zoya had not even known he could jump so well.

And why had she thought he had not understood her words? He had understood her perfectly; otherwise he would have landed on the island, as always. But they were now on the other side of the stream. Zoya embraced the Little Donkey and kissed him on his warm grey muzzle.

'Thank you, dear Little Donkey,' she said.

And without a backward glance she set off along the well-trodden path through the grass.

The path led up a hill. The farther she got from the stream, the lower was the grass. There was nothing in sight save the grass. Zoya walked and walked uphill until she was quite tired. Surely she wasn't wrong; there must be a white house about somewhere? What would she do if there wasn't?

And then all of a sudden tree tops came into sight beyond the hill. Zoya was so happy she started to run. But she was soon out of breath and had to slow down.

The trees came closer and there behind them a white house came in view. It stood in a clearing and was surrounded by a white fence with a gate.

'If only he's at home!' she murmured as she crossed the clearing. 'If only he's at home and I can explain everything.'

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

AT UNCLE TADEUS'S HOUSE

The white gates were unlocked. Zoya pushed them open and went into the yard. Across the neat green lawn she spied a two-storey narrow house with a veranda that ran the whole length of the ground floor. Uncle Painter was standing on the veranda steps. He was exactly as he had once sketched himself: his narrow face was framed in a dark velvet beret and a choker neatly tied at the collar of a white shirt. And a big brownish-red bird was sitting on his shoulder.

'Unc...' Zoya uttered a cry and stopped short.

'Hello there, Zoya!' called Uncle kindly, smiling, as if he knew her well. He kissed the top of her head, hugged her by the shoulders and led her indoors.

A narrow wooden staircase rightaway led from the tall white door with its brass twisted knocker. At the top was a carved window with flowerpots standing on the sill. Zoya felt she had climbed those stairs before once upon a time.

The Painter opened wide the tall brown door. Zoya at once sensed the smell of paints.

'Come on in, come in, Zoya,' Uncle said inviting her indoors. 'You'll find it interesting.'

She found herself in the painter's studio. Around the walls stood and hung various pictures, paints were scattered over a roughly-hewn table by the window, and brushes stuck out of a tall glass. Her eyes alit on a carved black box—exactly the same as the one Aunt Janina had given Zoya on her birthday. Zoya went straight up to it and fingered it lightly.

'Do you like it?' asked Uncle Tadeus.

'I've got one just the same,' replied Zoya quietly. 'Only it doesn't open.'

'Impossible!' exclaimed Uncle Tadeus. And he brought the box closer to his eyes. 'You can't open this one so easily either; all of these ancient things have their own secret.' He handed Zoya the box. 'Have a try, open it.'

Zoya did not know how to start talking about what she had come about; and so as not to offend her Uncle, she tried to prise the box open. But she couldn't.

'Now just take a good look at it,' he said. 'Perhaps you'll spot something.'

Zoya, still preoccupied, began to turn the old box round, studying the carved pattern with its shining pieces of mother-of-pearl. Ladies in long gowns were pictured on it, and each was holding a branch. It was all exactly as it was on Zoya's box. And then Zoya noticed a flower bud on a branch; it was more pronounced than the other blossoms and branches. Zoya glanced up at her Uncle who nodded almost imperceptibly.

'Just press it,' he said. 'But don't do it now.'

He said it in such a way that Zoya realised the time was ripe for her to speak. Her voice faltered.

'Uncle...' she began. 'Uncle Tadeus... The scallywags no longer have the White Flower. And they cannot live without it.'

The Painter frowned and shrugged his shoulders.

'What can I do about it?' he said. 'They should have looked after it.'

'But it's not their fault. It was me, me! All because of me!' And Zoya burst into tears. She had not expected Uncle to greet her news so coldly.

But he had turned away and was tidying up the paints on the table; Zoya noticed that his hands were shaking.

'What stupidity!' he said sharply. 'What have you got to do with it? I know all there is to know.'

'Dear Uncle, I showed her the picture and the scallywags... And then she followed me...'

'You've no right to be here anyway,' the Painter muttered. 'Is that the way they bring you up?'

Zoya could see he was annoyed. Well, so what! As long as he helped the scallywags she didn't mind. She ran to the Painter, snuggle to his arm, saying,

'Uncle, please do something. They are such harmless creatures, so ... defenceless.'

'I know what they are, Zoya,' Uncle Tadeus answered much more kindly now, stroking her hair. 'And I'm glad you've grown to like them. I even tried to paint...'

He picked up a picture and placed it on his easel facing the wall. Come and take a look.'

The painting showed a flower, fresh, healthy, very much like *the one,* the real White Flower.

'It's very like it...' murmured Zoya shyly.

'Yes, like it. Similar but not quite. And I don't know whether I can...' The Painter once more looked at the picture and remained discontent. 'No, you don't get the same thing twice. Incidentally... Why must it be the same, eh, Zoya? So long as it is alive, so long as it blends with the colour, with the picture's music, isn't that right? What do you think?'

Zoya did not know, could not answer, but she was pleased that Uncle had taken up the work again. He had already picked up a brush and was liberally altering the shape of the petals, lengthening the stem...

'How do you call them?' he asked gaily as he worked. 'Scallywags? Why scallywags?'

'Well... I don't know...'

'Very funny. They really are loveable, aren't they? When I first painted such a "scallywag", you see, Zoya, I was living abroad and pined for my homeland. And all of a sudden they came to me. These beings. I had thought them up. Do you understand—myself! I then felt happy with myself.'

And then he suddenly added mysteriously,

'One day you will find your *own* scallywags.'

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

THE RETURN

Zoya had not understood what Uncle was talking about, but she did want to have her own scallywags.

'But how?' Zoya asked in a whisper. 'How will I find them?'

'First of all,' he said, 'you must draw something you like. Something interesting. Something you like very much or don't like at all.'

And he ordered suddenly,

'Take a piece of paper and sit down here at the table. Then you won't get in my way. Now, get on with your work.'

And he paid her no more attention.

There was no doubt in Zoya's mind what, or rather, *who* she did not like. She drew a short-haired girl with a toffee in her hand. And then, with a line here, here and there, she drew lines through her. And she herself suddenly felt that it had not come out well. Black smudges ran across the girl's arm and shoulder like whip lashes; that was bound to hurt her.

Zoya looked up at her Uncle.

'Of course it hurts,' he said. 'What do you want to hurt her for?'

Zoya bent her head and kept silent. But *she* knew what for, for everything she'd done!

For the scallywags—it was so hard for them with all the days flashing by; and for going and spoiling everything. Oh, that Luba, such a wicked girl, she can't even play fairly: gets caught out by the skipping rope, doesn't keep her eyes shut when Zoya tells her—and then climbs into the painting! And she scared Lilac Scallywag; realised nothing about the White Flower, made a rope out of it; and scoffs toffees by herself without offering them round!

And Zoya scored through her drawing once again.

'Aha, Zoya,' said Uncle in surprise. 'You seem to be not so kind after all.'

'I don't care,' replied Zoya, without looking up. 'It's only a drawing.'

'But you forgot about the pit. You did want your friend to...'

'What friend is she to me?'

'Well, let's just call her a girl then.'

'A bad girl,' argued Zoya. She had never spoken to anyone like that before; something had got into her.

'She's a naughty girl, Uncle, believe me.'

'A fairly ordinary girl, I would say. After all, she was hungry.'

Zoya fell silent because she knew Uncle was right about that. But he knew nothing about the skipping rope and the toffees, or even the hunger... You can't do things like that even when you're hungry.

Only Zoya could not explain all that, so she just mumbled something, scarcely audible,

'She's just like that, that's all.'

'What if she fell into your trap and broke her leg while you are here?' Uncle asked. 'Or no one comes to the stream and she can't climb out? You certainly know what would happen?'

'Yes.'

'Would you like that?'

No, Zoya would certainly not wish that, she had not even thought of that. Now she began to worry.

'Uncle, what if...'

'So, you see, Zoya. To tell you the truth, I'm not at all pleased with the way you're behaving.'

Now Zoya was not so pleased with herself either. She felt ashamed and downcast. Wouldn't it be nice if someone could put things right, could pet and take pity on her, as Mother had always done. Anyway, she was so very sad she'd not seen her Mother for so long. Zoya suddenly covered the drawing with her hands, laid her head down and burst into tears.

'Now then, now then, Zoya.'

The Painter's light hand stroked her hair.

'I want my Mummy,' cried Zoya. 'I'm not naughty, I'm not naughty.'

'I'll help you return,' murmured Uncle kindly.

'And Luba?'

'Her too. Come and see how the flower has turned out.'

Zoya looked, but because of her tears the flower swam before her eyes. All the same she could see that the flower was not much of a likeness. The little petals all bunched together were wider and more compact; they wouldn't be able to open up so easily, or so it seemed. Even the colour was different: it wasn't quite white—it had red and lilac smudges on the tips.

Zoya wiped her eyes to take a better look.

'It has come out a bit different...'

'Naturally,' said Uncle.

'What will happen then?'

'Well, life too will take a different course.'

'Worse?'

'I don't know that myself yet, Zoya. Simply different.'

'Because of me,' thought Zoya again. And then she corrected herself, 'No, because of that Luba. She has to poke her nose in everywhere. Now what about Luba?' asked Zoya.

'Your friend must get out,' the Painter replied. And Zoya felt he was getting cross again. 'But she won't get out without your help.'

Uncle gave her his hand. 'Come on, my girl,' he said.

His hand was warm and kindly. No, he wasn't cross. Not with Zoya anyway.

They left the studio. On the threshold Zoya glanced back at the painting. And she noticed something: the lush petals of the flower were pressing upon the little green box, pushing it wider and wider; and meanwhile a strong sweet-scented fragrance was clearly discernible through the paint; it made one slightly dizzy. The flower had begun to come alive!

They made their way down the unlit staircase; it was dark beyond the high window. Zoya had quite forgotten about that: daytime, then evening, darkness. She could no longer make out the steps, could not understand where they were going. It was just like playing 'find-your-way-home', only no one had twirled her round. And it was certainly no game.

Touch collar
Never swallow

Never catch the fever,
Touch your knee
Touch your chin
Never let the tom cat in.
One for you
One for me
One for all the family.
Cross my fingers
Cross my toes
That's the way the game goes...

All of a sudden, Zoya felt a fresh breeze redolent with the smell of the earth, the grass, bushes and trees. They were now leaving the Painter's house... And she began to worry.

'Uncle,' Zoya called him very softly. 'Uncle, will you never give me your gift now?'

'Oh you silly little girl, Zoya,' he said smiling in the darkness. 'How do you think you could have lived here, with us, and got to know us all?'

And he kissed her on the head. 'Run along now. And don't be afraid. There's no path, so you'll have to feel your way along. Do you think you'll be all right?'

Zoya nodded. She wanted to ask something else, but at once forgot because a familiar voice was calling her in the distance.

'Zoya! Zoya!'

'It's Mother,' she shouted and ran hard. She ran as fast as she could, tripping over stones, or it might have been flower-beds. And she held her breath, listening for Mother's voice to reach her ears again. But it was quiet. The girl came to a halt.

The bushes around her rustled in the breeze.

A tall tower block appeared at hand, etched against the dark sky. Its windows were all lit up in different colours. Zoya realised straightaway that it was a town house. She emerged from the bushes and felt asphalt beneath her feet.

Her eyes gradually got used to the dark and Zoya saw an apple sapling—that was familiar!

'That being so,' Zoya thought, 'if that's the case, there ought to





be a tumbledown fence around here somewhere.' And there it was. And bricks, and bits of wood, and planks from pulled down houses. Yet Zoya was uncertain which way to go; she had not been on this wasteland at night. She fumbled in the pocket of her trousers and felt a crumpled piece of paper. Taking it out she made her way to a lamppost—she hadn't noticed that either in the daylight—and read the words in the dull glow of the lamp. They were written in Mother's neat handwriting:

Apartment 101, 7, Cherrywood Drive.

A lady was walking slowly along the pavement, leading a fierce-looking bulldog on a leash. Zoya stepped briskly towards them.

'Would you be kind enough to tell me where Cherrywood Drive is?' she asked.

'You'll have to go round, little girl,' the lady replied. 'There's a building site ahead.'

And she explained exactly how Zoya could find her house.

Zoya did not recognise the streets at all. And that was hardly surprising, since she had lived there such a short while. What a relief, what a good thing that Mother had put the address in her pocket!

CHAPTER NINETEEN

HOME

Zoya finally found her entrance, took the lift to the fourth floor and pressed the bell. She heard hurried footsteps. It was Mother. Of course it was Mother—only she wore high heels indoors.

The door opened. Zoya saw her Mother's frightened eyes and saw her take two steps backward. Then suddenly she rushed forward and embraced Zoya, crying. When she had finished crying, she began to search for a handkerchief in her pocket, while clinging to Zoya. But she didn't have a hankie, so Mother wiped her wet face with the end of Zoya's pigtail.

'Janina,' she shouted. 'Janina. Come here.'

'What? What is...' And Aunt Janina froze.

Then she took her glasses from her pocket, put them on and came up to Zoya on tiptoe, as if scared of frightening her away.

'Dear child,' murmured Aunt Janina, feeling Zoya's hands to make sure she wasn't seeing things. And then in the same hushed tones she said again,

'My dear child.'

And only then did she burst into tears.

Zoya did not quite understand why it was they were crying so much; she was glad to be back, and she was even gladder that Aunt Janina had found a hankie, since Zoya's pigtails were not long enough to mop up all the tears being shed that night.

All of a sudden, something alive and warm pressed against Zoya's legs. Without taking her glance from the weeping women, Zoya bent down and smoothed the soft fur of the former neighbour's cat.

I shall not bore you with what happened next: how all the lights were turned on in the apartment, how all the best jars of home-made jam were opened and how Aunt Janina baked a special pie—much better than the one Luba Vilkina had taken such a fancy to that time. Zoya broke off a piece, dropped her hand below the table, calling,

'Puss, puss, puss.'

Just at that moment the doorbell rang. And Zoya knew at once who was there. She herself ran to open the door. It was Luba. Alive and well. Her legs were not broken, they were shod in dusty red wedge-heeled shoes with scraped toes. And through her dress where it came down to her right elbow, there was a barely visible stripe, rather like a scar.

Aunt Janina standing behind Zoya cried,

'Luba, so you've also been found. Thank Goodness.'

Luba Vilkina nodded politely to her, then told them in some surprise,

'Mother was ever so concerned about me, she even cried. Father too. They were absolutely certain I would never stray far.'

Zoya inspected the stripe on Luba's sleeve.

'Where did you scratch yourself, Luba?' asked Aunt Janina.

'Oh, that's nothing,' answered Luba. 'I've almost cleaned it all up.'

She smoothed her skin with her hand, rubbed the dark stripe and suddenly darted a sideways glance at Zoya.

'Another time you...' Luba began, but left it there.

Uncle Tadeus was right, of course, when he had asked Zoya not to do it again, and Zoya wanted to tell Luba straightaway that she wouldn't do it again. But she kept her thoughts to herself: she herself did not yet know how she would act another time.

'Girls, girls, come and have a cup of tea and some pie,' called Mother from the kitchen.

CHAPTER TWENTY

UNCLE TADEUS'S GIFT

The girls sat down in silence at the table.

'My dear children,' said Aunt Janina fussing round them. 'Dig into the pie. It really is delicious.'

'It certainly is,' said Luba nodding politely and, leaning towards Zoya, she muttered,

'Her pie is better than yours ... in the sketch... Besides, it was covered with sand.'

'What's that?' asked Mother in surprise.

'We're just playing, Mummy,' said Zoya. And she hissed in Luba's ear, 'You could have come out in the open instead of hiding and watching us...'

'What did I want with those little monsters?'

'Why did you come crawling after us then?' said Zoya.

'So what, I wasn't going to let you loose all by yourself.'

'Girls, girls, what are you whispering about?' asked Mother, coming over to them.

'We haven't seen each other for so long,' blurted out Luba. She held out her hand to Aunt Janina.

'Thank you for the pie.'

And to Zoya's Mother she said.

'Thank you for your kindness.'

And off home she went. Mother and Aunt Janina took Zoya to her room and put her to bed. When they had both kissed her goodnight and left the room, Zoya got straight out of bed. The room seemed just as if no one had been in there while she had been gone; only the dust had been wiped from the table, the window sill and all the shelves. A smooth shiny leaf lay on the table alongside her sketchbook; veins and arteries spread out all over it from its thick stem. Once more Zoya thought how much it resembled a human hand. Just a moment! What was it doing there? Zoya ran in her nightdress into the next room. Mother and Aunt Janina were busy clearing the table.

'What's the matter, dear child?' asked Aunt Janina.

'Where's this from?' asked Zoya, holding out the leaf.

'Oh, that's a funny business,' said Mother with a smile. 'When I noticed you were gone and began to look for you in the apartment—I had thought you might have been here somewhere—I went into my room and found it on the floor.'

'Under the painting?' asked Zoya excitedly.

'So it seems. Anyway on the floor. I was quite surprised: we don't have leaves like that round here. When I examined it—can you credit it? I began to feel less anxious. Auntie Janina will back me up. Most peculiar, of course.'

Zoya smiled. She left a sad yet warm thrill when thinking of the orange day, the dear little scallywags, their innocence and kindness. Zoya kissed her Mother and Aunt Janina and went quietly back to her room. She switched on the table lamp and opened the painting book.

She stared at the little men in their three-cornered caps which she had once drawn, so very long ago. How like the scallywags they were, and yet how unlike them. Just like when you hang painted paper apples on the Christmas Tree. Similar, but not the real thing.

By chance her gaze fell upon her bedside table: the black carved box was lying there. Zoya picked up the strange old box and shook it by her ear. As before there was something rattling

and rolling about. The ladies in their long gowns smiled up at her from the lid, and each had a branch. But one of them was holding... Yes, there it was, a bud of one of the flowers was slightly more pronounced. Zoya pressed it at once. Something shivered, creaked and the black lid opened by itself.

Zoya excitedly peered inside. There was no doubt about it. There, inside the old box of the famous painter Uncle Tadeus lay ... just two paintbrushes: they were old and worn out; there was also the stub of a pencil.

If Zoya had been Luba Vilkina, she would probably have curled her lip in contempt and exclaimed,

'Fancy keeping that rubbish!'

But Zoya was Zoya and she did so want to become a real painter. So she said nothing at all, only gently touched the things that retained the aura of great work.

Zoya put down the box beside her and again set to painting at the table. At the top of her paper there appeared a greyish sky. Then it turned slightly pink. Then came a tree—perhaps an oak. And black mysterious branches pierced the heavens; then Zoya realised that this was something worth looking at carefully. So she did: she gazed at it circumspectly. And then grass appeared—two brownish-grey stems. And a hollow in the tree. Out of the hollow an owl peered short-sightedly woken up by the arrival of evening. The branches rustled, the blades of grass bobbed their heads, and someone's footprints appeared barely visible in the sand. The picture began to come to life; it began to breathe. It was not at all like what Uncle Tadeus had painted; all the same, if you wanted to, if you made an effort...

Mother evidently had been calling Zoya. And Zoya had evidently not heard her. Mother peeped into the room: the girl was sitting over a sheet of paper. Mother nodded and said nothing, perfectly content. In actual fact, things were not as simple as they seemed, since Zoya could leave for that place, for that tree, the hollow and there she would meet... No, it's not yet certain who. But she could go there at almost any time she wished.





